

SPORTS
FINAL

Back in action: World League
kicks off this weekend.

WLAF HAS MOVES FOR PRO FOOTBALL

ENTERS 5th YEAR
WITH NFL LOOK, 1B

**PRE-PLAYOFF Q&A:
JORDAN TALKS
ABOUT FUTURE 4B**

FRI./SAT./SUN., APRIL 11-13, 1997

NEWSLINE

A QUICK READ ON THE NEWS

DOLLAR: Midday quotes in New York for key currencies: Pound at \$1.6197 from \$1.6194; U.S. dollar at 1.7176 marks from 1.7245; 126.02 yen from 126.77. Table. 9B.

► Gold in London at \$348.05, from \$347.80.

FAA PROBE: Following TWA Flight 800 crash off New York coast, Federal Aviation Administration wants to know if fuel tanks on other jets also could explode. 3A.

MISSING PILOT: Disappearance of Air Force pilot and "Warthog" jet in Colorado Rockies continues to baffle family and authorities, spawns conspiracy theories. 2A.

CHURCH AND STATE: Judge Roy Moore, left, who displays the Ten Commandments in his courtroom, refuses to invite members of differing religions to lead prayer there. Critics say practice shows ignorance of faiths other than his own. 3A.



By Mark Davis

Moore: Not a prayer
with critics

TODAY'S DEBATE: Fund-raising. In USA TODAY's opinion, "As fund-raising questions fly, White House officials bob and weave to avoid accountability." 6A.

► "We need campaign reform. The president and the Democrats favor it," says Lanny Davis. 6A.

FEEDING FRENZY: British tabloids had a field day with arrest of Anthony-Noel Kelly, acquaintance of Prince Charles and cousin to Duke of Norfolk. 4A.

DNC PROBE: Senate panel probing illegalities in campaign fund-raising are interviewing current and former Democratic National Committee officials in preparation for hearings later this spring. 5A.

MONEY: Apple Computers is talking with Sun Microsystems about selling its Newton division. 10B.

► P&G sees foreign sales in a discreet sector. 9B.

► Distilled Spirits Council CEO talks advertising. 9B.



Rubin steps

Bloomberg News

The United States hasn't changed its policy on the dollar, which has strengthened in line with strong growth in the U.S. economy relative to its trading partners, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin said Thursday.

Rubin's remarks came on the day the dollar tumbled from a 55-month high vs. the yen. His remarks comforted the market

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Answers elusive in saga of

Searchers assume
Capt. Craig Button
and his bomb-laden
warplane crashed
in the deep snows of
the central Rockies

By Patrick O'Driscoll
USA TODAY

One minute, Air Force Capt. Craig Button's A-10 Thunderbolt II was the third of three warplanes lining up for a practice bombing run in clear Arizona skies.

The next minute, Button was, in the words of a staff sergeant at Tucson's Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, "totally gone."

Nine days later, veteran search-and-rescue pilots, fellow military aviators and baffled family and friends all wonder: How and why did the 33-year-old flier and his "Warthog" jet vanish last week?

No one yet has the answer. It may lie buried forever, or perhaps only until summer, in the deep snows of 12,580-foot New York Mountain in Colorado's rugged central Rockies.

Civil Air Patrol searchers believe Button's heavily armored, bomb-laden craft crashed there last week, possibly after running out of fuel. Its mysterious, off-course journey apparently was caught on military and civilian radar along an odd, arrow-straight route from the southern Arizona desert to the heart of Colorado's high country. Some of the 2,000 calls from civilian sky-watchers to an Air Force hot line also helped.

"We assume (the plane) is down there, yes," Lt. Col. Dick Hugen of the air patrol's Colorado wing said.

"Poor devil," said John Vanderhoof, a former Colorado governor and longtime pilot.

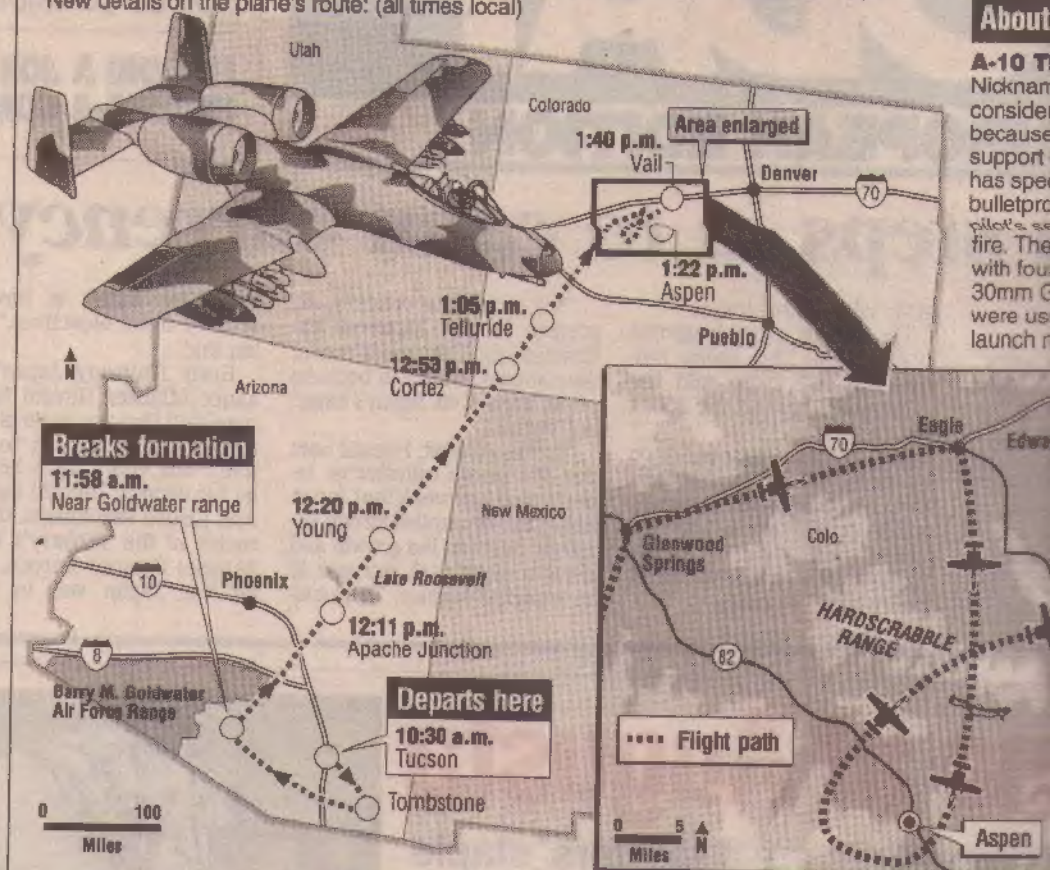
"You need a lot of luck, particularly with military planes," added Vanderhoof, who flew F-6 Helicat fighters off carriers as a Navy pilot in World War II. "They're terribly hard to find. Most military planes are painted for camouflage so it has to be turned inside out for you to see an unpainted side of metal. Most planes are found when a search pilot gets lucky and sees the sun glint off something."

Cross-country skiers in the area heard a boom and assumed it was an avalanche — until they reported black smoke rising in the distance. Barn-builders outside Edwards, Colo., told forest rangers they heard a "big explosion" that day near Hardscrabble Mountain, west of New York Mountain. Another local resident told the U.S. Forest Service this week he saw fire and flames on New York Mountain last Thursday night.

"We aren't entertaining any thought he went someplace else. He's there. We just have to find him," Hugen said. "The snow covered him up. We may not find him until summer."

The missing Warthog's apparent

Military and civilian sightings suggest that the missing A-10 Thunderbolt II abruptly changed direction near Colo. Such a maneuver throws doubt on whether the warplane was operating on autopilot, aviation experts continue in the New York Mountain area for the plane and pilot that disappeared April 2. New details on the plane's route: (all times local)



Reported by Tammi Wark, USA TODAY

Mountain-high speculation continues about what might have brought Button and his jet to such a tragic end.

Was it a suddenly stricken man's desperate reach for the jet's autopilot switch that sent the aircraft on a bizarre beeline 800 miles off course and halfway across Colorado? Was he the victim of oxygen deprivation at high altitude, unaware until the druglike condition dragged him into unconsciousness?

Or was the A-10's weird wandering some kind of misguided, suicidal joy ride?

Col. Barry Barksdale, commander of Button's 355th Fighter Wing at Davis-Monthan, said Wednesday that accounts from people in Colorado who reported the plane was circling shortly before the time it is believed to have gone down suggest "the aircraft was being flown at that time."

Beyond that lies only mystery. Button's jet is yet another military plane lacking a "black box."

Many wonder whether Button, fighting a seizure, stroke or other sudden incapacitation, reached reflexively for the jet's autopilot control. "We are trained, if we do get disoriented or some other situation, to switch on the autopilot," said Capt. Martha McSally, 31, an A-10 pilot also based at Davis-Monthan, where Button took off mid-morning April 2 for a routine mission.

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Involved in the search Air National Guard, the Wing's own A-10s and EC National Guard in both Air U-2 spy plane that flew over Force Base in California.

Vail, Colo., was within based on the estimated flight.

The Air Force pieced together tapes and various eyewitness accounts of the apparent flight from the Range, a practice site about northeast past the Four Corners.

Air patrol searchers assumed an end on the edge of Colorado.

"People are saying that going down and dropped by a district ranger for White Mountain are speculating on a lot of other things."

On the Internet, aviation the technical to the bizarre "patriot" militias, a UFO or Hollywood thriller Broker John Travolta hijacks a mission in Button's native Massachusetts.

THE NATION

in saga of missing pilot

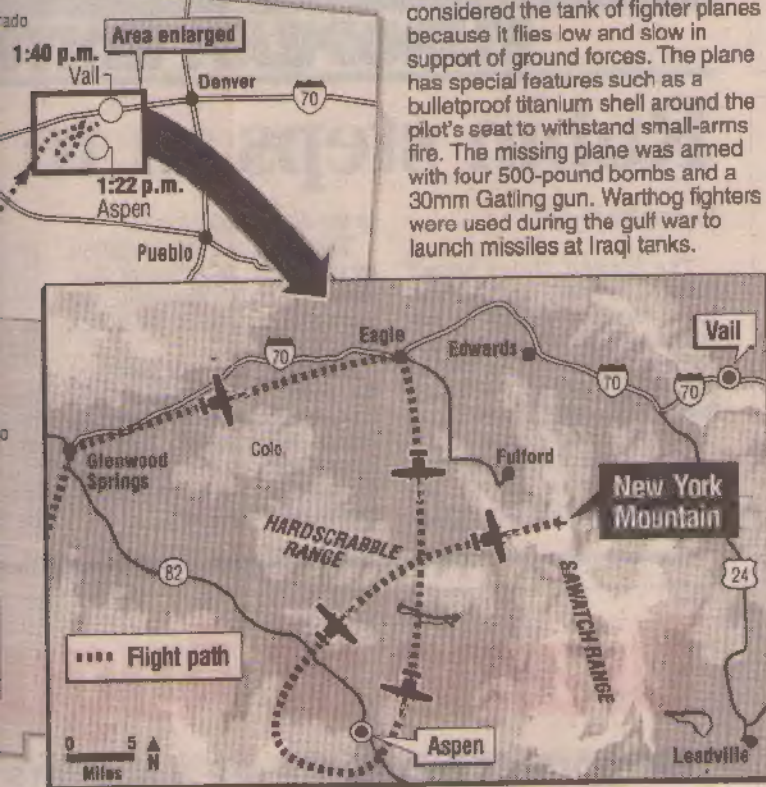
Warthog's apparent path

An A-10 Thunderbolt II abruptly changed direction near Glenwood Springs, where the warplane was operating on autopilot, aviation experts say. The search for the plane and pilot that disappeared April 2.

About the plane

A-10 Thunderbolt II

Nicknamed the Warthog, the A-10 is considered the tank of fighter planes because it flies low and slow in support of ground forces. The plane has special features such as a bulletproof titanium shell around the pilot's seat to withstand small-arms fire. The missing plane was armed with four 500-pound bombs and a 30mm Gatling gun. Warthog fighters were used during the gulf war to launch missiles at Iraqi tanks.



By Gary Vispallis, Grant Jerding and Dave Merrill, USA TODAY

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Involved in the search so far: the Civil Air Patrol, the Air National Guard, the Air Force Reserve, the 355th Wing's own A-10s and EC-130 AWACS aircraft, the Army National Guard in both Arizona and Colorado, and even a U-2 spy plane that flew earlier this week from Beale Air Force Base in California.

Vail, Colo., was within the A-10's range, said McSally, based on the estimated fuel left in the tanks.

The Air Force pieced together air traffic control radar tapes and various eyewitness spottings to trace the jet's apparent flight from the Barry Goldwater Air Force Range, a practice site about 100 miles west of Tucson, northeast past the Four Corners and into Colorado.

Air patrol searchers assume the baffling flight came to an end on the edge of Colorado's Holy Cross Wilderness.

"People are saying that maybe the pilot knew he was going down and dropped his bombs," said Anne Huebner, district ranger for White River National Forest. "People are speculating on a lot of things."

On the Internet, aviation buffs spouted theories from the technical to the bizarre. Among the unusual suspects: "patriot" militias, a UFO or even a copycat of the recent Hollywood thriller *Broken Arrow*, in which rogue pilot John Travolta hijacks a nuclear-armed bomber.

In Button's native Massapequa, N.Y., his family re-

3-hour, 10-minute mystery

Chronology of the plane's disappearance on April 2. All times are local.

10:30 a.m. Air Force Capt. Craig Button departs Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Ariz., in an A-10 Thunderbolt II. The warplane is refueled near Tombstone, Ariz.

11:58 a.m. Button's warplane vanishes as it and two other A-10s maneuver into formation for bombing practice at Barry Goldwater Air Force Range.

12:11 p.m. An eyewitness on the ground spots the A-10 flying northeast over Apache Junction, Ariz., about 40 miles east of Phoenix.

12:20 p.m. Another eyewitness on the ground sees the A-10 flying northeast over Young, Ariz.

12:25-12:47 p.m. Radar from the Federal Aviation Administration's Albuquerque Center records the continued northeast flight path of what appears to be the A-10 across northeastern Arizona to the Four Corners region.

12:53-1:05 p.m. Radar from the FAA's Denver Center records the same northeast flight path from the Colorado border, crossing over Cortez, Colo., where another sighting is reported from the ground.

1:22 p.m. After more sightings from the ground around Montrose, Colo., the FAA's Denver radar again records a flight path near Glenwood Springs, Colo., where its path suddenly shifts.

1:33 p.m. The flight path loops west and north, heading northeast again toward Vail, Colo.

1:40 p.m. Last radar signal is recorded near 12,580-foot New York Mountain, southwest of Vail.

treated to silence Wednesday in their cream-colored ranch house, angered by news media speculation about his fate.

His dad, World War II flight instructor Richard Button, said the news accounts had "totally upset" the family. Earlier, he had described his son as "A-OK, stable" and a passionate flier who dreamed of emulating the pilots in the movie *Top Gun*.

After his A-10 training, Capt. Button was to return in June to Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio, Texas, where he has been a T-37 instructor-pilot. He was due for an overseas assignment at Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany a month later. His sixth anniversary of active duty in the Air Force is Friday.

Neighbor Frances Bisignano walked to the Buttons' home Wednesday "to express my sympathy and concern" to the hopeful family. But assuming a week in deep Colorado snow, their optimism is flagging, she said.

Norma Jean Broten reported hearing what sounded like a thunderclap while walking her dog last week, just about the time the plane is believed to have gone down, in a cloudless Colorado sky.

Contributing: Ellen Miller, Allen Best, Steven Komarow and Linda Kanamine